

Media Agenda and Public Agenda: A Study of Issues during the 13th General Election

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ABSTRACT

Media might play an important role in public's voting decision. Even so, it is unknown whether the media agenda counterpart public agenda with regard to the level of importance of the issues covered in the media. This study examined the issues of concern by the Malaysian mainstream newspapers, as well as the issues of concern by the public during the 13th General Election (GE 13). In particular, this study explored the relationship between media and public agenda; as well as the relationship between Malay language newspaper agenda and the Malay public agenda. Content analysis and survey were performed to fulfil these objectives. The findings showed that the media has different agenda from the public. In addition, the Malay newspaper and public of the same ethnic group do not share similar agenda of issues. On top of that, the findings showed the priority of issues perceived by media and public are different. While the public see national security as the most important issue of the country, media on the other hand, set religion and politics as the priority in their agenda.

Keywords: *Malay newspaper, media agenda, public agenda, issues, 13th General Election*

INTRODUCTION

The results of 13th general election brought a new political scenario in Malaysia. The ruling party Barisan Nasional suffered a huge defeat at the hands of the opposition, and failed to win two-third majority. The opposition, represented by Pakatan Rakyat (PR), won the majority seats especially in areas dominated by Chinese voters. Despite the GE 13 results which was described by many BN leaders including the Prime Minister Najib Razak, as 'Chinese Tsunami' (Oh Ei Sun, 2014), it cannot be denied that the Malays constitute the majority of Malaysian voters. GE 13 marks a new trend in the political scenario in Malaysia. For the first time in the Malaysian election history, the battle between the pro-government (BN) and opposition (PR) political parties were dominated by Malays.

It is believed that the GE 13 results are highly influenced by media. Media are crucial in politics due to its attribute of immediate and instant dissemination of political issues (Zahid, Sarah and Hassan, 2013). Despite the emergence of Internet and social media which